

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

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A SERMON
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*“Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you
will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”
Philippians 1:6.*

THE dangers which attend the spiritual life are of the most appalling character. The life of a Christian is a series of miracles. See a spark living in mid ocean, see a stone hanging in the air, see health blooming in a leper colony, and the snow-white swan among rivers of filth, and you behold an image of the Christian life. The new nature is kept alive between the jaws of death, preserved by the power of God from instant destruction—by no power less than divine could its existence be continued.

When the instructed Christian sees his surroundings, he finds himself to be like a defenseless dove flying to her nest, while against her tens of thousands of arrows are leveled. The Christian life is like that dove's anxious flight as it threads its way between the death-bearing shafts of the enemy, and by constant miracle escapes unhurt. The enlightened Christian sees himself to be like a traveler standing on the narrow summit of a lofty ridge—on the right hand and on the left are unfathomable gulfs, yawning for his destruction. If it were not that by divine grace his feet are made like hinds' feet, so that he is able to stand upon his high places, he would long ere this have fallen to his eternal destruction.

Alas! my brethren, we have seen too many professors of religion thus fall. It is the great and standing grief of the Christian church, that so many in her midst become apostates. It is true they are not truly of her, but beforehand it is not possible for her to know this. Not a few of her brightest stars have been swallowed up of night. Those who bid fairest to be fruitful trees in Christ's vineyard have turned out to be cumberers of the ground, or very upas trees, dripping poison on all around.

The young Christian, therefore, if he be observant, fears lest after putting on his burnished harness, amid the congratulations of friends, he may return from the battle ingloriously defeated. He does not pride himself because, like some gallant knight, he puts on his glittering harness. But as he buckles on his helmet, and grasps his sword, he fears lest he should be brought back into the camp with his escutcheon marred, and his crest trailed in the dust.

To such an one, conscious of spiritual perils, and fearful lest he should be overcome by them, the doctrine of the text will afford richest encouragement. If we are helped to set forth the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, so as to commend this truth to your understandings, and confirm it upon your souls, we shall be glad at heart, because the truth will make you glad, and strong, and thankful.

Without further preface, we shall *expound the apostle's words*, in order to show in detail the matter of his confidence. We shall then, in the second place, *support that confidence by further arguments*. And then, thirdly, we shall seek to *draw out certain excellent uses from the doctrine* which the text undoubtedly teaches.

I. First, let us EXPOUND THE APOSTLE'S OWN WORDS.

He speaks of a *good work* commenced in “all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.” By this he intended the work of grace in the soul which is of the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is eminently a good work since it works nothing but good in the heart that is the subject of it. To bring a man from darkness into light is good, to deliver him from the bondage of his natural corruption, and make him the Lord's free man must be good. It is good for himself, it is good for society, it is good for

the church of God, it is good for the glory of God Himself. It is so good a thing, that he who receives it becomes the heir of all good, and moreover, the advocate and author of further good.

This good is the best that a man can receive. To make a man healthy in body, and wealthy in estate, to educate his mind, and train his faculties, all these are good, but in comparison with the salvation of the soul, they sink into insignificance. The work of sanctification is a good work in the highest possible sense, since it influences a man by good motives, sets him on good works, introduces him among good men, gives him fellowship with good angels, and in the end makes him like unto the good God Himself.

Moreover, the inner life is a good work because it springs and originates from the pure goodness of God. As it is always good to show mercy, so it is pre-eminently good on God's part to work upon sinful and fallen men so as to renew them after the image of Him who created them. The work of grace has its root in the divine goodness of the Father. It is planted by the self-denying goodness of the Son, and it is daily watered by the goodness of the Holy Spirit. It springs from good and leads to good, and so is altogether good.

The apostle calls it a "*work*," and in the deepest sense it is indeed a work to convert a soul. If Niagara could suddenly be made to leap upward instead of forever dashing downward from its rocky height, it were not such a miracle as to change the perverse will, and the raging passions of men. To wash the Ethiopian white, or remove the leopard's spots, is proverbially a difficulty, yet these are but surface works. To renew the very core of manhood, and tear sin from its hold upon man's heart, this is not only the finger of God, but the baring of His arm.

Conversion is a work comparable to the making of a world. He only who fashioned the heavens and the earth could create a new nature. It is a work that is not to be paralleled, it is unique and unrivalled, seeing that Father, Son, and Spirit must all cooperate in it—for to implant the new nature in the Christian, there must be the decree of the Eternal Father, the death of the ever-blessed Son, and the fullness of the operation of the adorable Spirit. It is a work indeed. The labors of Hercules were but trifles compared with this. To slay lions and hydras, and cleanse Augean stables, all this is child's play compared with renewing a right spirit in the fallen nature of man.

Observe that the apostle affirms that this good work was *begun by God*. He was evidently no believer in those remarkable powers which some theologians ascribe to free will. He was no worshipper of that modern Diana of the Ephesians. He declares that the good work was begun by God, from which I gather that the faintest gracious desire which ultimately blossoms into the fragrant flower of earnest prayer and humble faith is the work of God. No, sinner, you shall never be beforehand with God! The first step towards ending the separation between the prodigal son and his father is taken by the Father, not by the son.

Midnight never seeks the sun. Long would it be ere darkness found within itself the germs of light. Long ages might revolve before Hades should develop the seeds of heaven, or Gehenna discover in its fires the elements of everlasting glory, but till then it shall never happen that corrupt nature shall educe from itself the germs of the new and spiritual life, or sigh after holiness and God.

I have heard lately, to my deep sorrow, certain preachers speaking of conversions as being developments. Is it so, then, that conversion is but the development of hidden graces within the human soul? It is not so. The theory is a lie from top to bottom. There lies within the heart of man no grain or vestige of spiritual good. He is to all good alien, insensible, dead, and he cannot be restored to God except by an agency which is altogether from without himself and from above. If you could develop what is in the heart of man, you would produce a devil, for that is the spirit which works in the children of disobedience. Develop that carnal mind which is enmity against God, and you cannot by any possibility be reconciled to Him, and the result is hell. The fact is, that the divine life has departed from the natural man—man is dead in sin, and life must come to him from the Giver of life, or he must remain dead forevermore. The work that is in the soul of a true Christian is not of his own beginning, but is commenced by the Lord.

It is further implied in the text, that *He who began the work must carry it on*. “He which has begun a good work in you will perform it,” will complete it, will finish it, as the margin puts it. The apostle does not say as much, but it is still in the run of the sense, if not of the words, that *God must perform it* or else it never will be performed. Along the road from sin to heaven, from the first leaving of the swine trough right up to the joyful entrance into the banquet, and the music and dancing of glorified spirits, every step we must be enabled to take by divine grace. Every good thing that is in a Christian, not merely begins, but progresses and is consummated by the fostering grace of God through Jesus Christ.

If my finger were on the golden latch of paradise, and my foot were on its jasper threshold, I should not take the last step so as to enter heaven unless the grace which brought me so far should enable me fully and fairly to complete my pilgrimage. Salvation is God’s work, not man’s. This is the theology which Jonah learned in the great fish college, in the university of the great deep—to which college it would be a good thing if many of our divines in these days could be sent, for human learning often puffs up with the idea of human sufficiency—but he that is schooled and disciplined in the college of a deep experience, and made to know the vileness of his own heart, as he peers into its chambers of imagery, will confess that from first to last salvation is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God that shows mercy.

But the apostle’s main drift in the verse is that this good work which is begun in believers by God, which can only be further performed by God, *most certainly will be so carried on*. You observe he declares himself to be confident of this truth. Why did Paul need to write so positively, “being confident of this very thing”? Surely, as an inspired man, he might simply have written, “He which has begun a good work in you!” but he gives us over and above the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the confidence which had been wrought in him as the result of his own personal faith.

He had been himself very graciously sustained, and he had been favored personally with such clear views of the character of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he felt quite confident that God would not leave His work unfinished. He felt in his own mind that whatever anybody else might affirm, he was fully assured and would stand to the truth, and defend it with all his might, that He which has begun a good work in His people will surely finish it in due season.

Indeed, dear friends, in the apostle’s words there is good argument. If the Lord began the good work, why should He not carry it on and finish it? If He stays His hand, what can be the motive? When a man commences a work, and leaves it half complete, it is often from want of power—men say of the unfinished tower, “This man began to build, and was not able to finish.” Want of forethought, or want of ability, must have stayed the work, but can you suppose JEHOVAH, the Omnipotent, ceasing from a work because of unforeseen difficulty which He is not able to overcome?

He sees the end from the beginning. He is almighty. His arm is not shortened. Nothing is too hard for Him. It were a base reflection upon the wisdom and power of God to believe that He has entered upon a work which He will not in due time conduct to a happy conclusion. God did not begin the work in any man’s soul without due deliberation and counsel. From all eternity He knew the circumstances in which that man would be placed, though He foresaw the hardness of the human heart and the fickleness of human love.

If then He deemed it wise to begin, how can it be supposed that He shall change and amend His resolve? There can be no conceivable reason with God for leaving off such a work—the same motive which dictated the commencement must still be in operation, and He is the same God. Therefore there must be the same result, namely, His continuing to do what He has done. Where is there an instance of God’s beginning any work and leaving it incomplete? Show me for once a world abandoned and thrown aside half-formed. Show me a universe cast off from the Great Potter’s wheel, with the design in outline, the clay half-hardened, and the form unshapely from incompleteness.

Direct me, I pray you, to a star, a sun, a satellite—nay, I will challenge you on lower ground—point me out a plant, an ant, a grain of dust that has about it any semblance of incompleteness. All that man completes, let him polish as he may, when it is put under the microscope, it is but roughly finished,

because man has only reached a certain stage, and cannot get beyond it. It is perfection to his feeble optics, but it is not absolute perfection. But all God's works are finished with wondrous care. He as accurately fashions the dust of a butterfly's wing, as those mighty orbs that gladden the silent night.

Yet, my brethren, some would persuade us that this great work of the salvation of souls is begun by God, and then deserted and left incomplete, and that there will be spirits lost forever upon whom the Holy Ghost once exerted His sanctifying power—for whom the Redeemer shed His precious blood, and whom the eternal Father once looked upon with eyes of complacent love. I believe no such thing. The repetition of such beliefs curdles my blood with horror. They sound like blasphemy.

Nay, what the Lord begins, He will complete, and if He puts His right hand to any work, He will not stay until the work is done, whether it be to smite Pharaoh with plagues, and at last to drown his chivalry in the Red Sea, or to lead His people through the wilderness like sheep, and bring them in the end into the land that flows with milk and honey. In nothing does JEHOVAH turn from His intent. "Has he said and shall he not do it? has he purposed it, and shall it not come to pass?" He is God and changes not, and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed. There is a world of argument in the quiet words which the apostle uses. He is confident, knowing what he does of the character of God, that he which has begun a good work in His saints will perform it until the day of Christ.

Notice the *time* mentioned in the text—the good work is to be perfected in the day of Christ, by which we suppose is intended the second coming of our Lord. The Christian will not be perfected until the Lord Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God. But how say you concerning those who have died before His coming? How is it with them?

I answer, their souls are doubtless perfect, and made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. But Holy Scripture does not regard a man as perfect when the soul is perfected, it regards his body as being a part of himself. And as the body will not rise again from the grave till the coming of the Lord Jesus, when we shall be revealed in the perfection of our manhood, even as He will be revealed, that day of the second coming is set as the day of the finished work which God has begun, when, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, body, soul, and spirit, shall see the face of God with acceptance, and forever and ever rejoice in the pleasures which are at God's right hand.

This is what we are looking forward to—that God who taught us to repent, will sanctify us wholly, that He who made the briny tear to flow, will wipe every tear from that selfsame eye. That He who made us gird ourselves with the sackcloth and the ashes of penitence, will yet gird us with the fair white linen which is the righteousness of the saints. He who brought us to the cross will bring us to the crown. He who made us look upon Him whom we pierced, and mourn because of Him, will cause us to see the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off.

The same dear hand that smote and afterwards healed, will in the latter days caress us. He who looked upon us when we were dead in sin, and called us into spiritual life, will continue to regard us with favor till our life shall be consummated in the land where there is no more death, sorrow nor sighing. Such is the truth which the text evidently teaches us.

One remark I here feel bound to make, though it is running somewhat from the theme. It is this: I marvel beyond measure at those of our Christian brethren who hold the doctrine of the final perseverance, and yet remain in the Anglican church, because their so remaining is utterly inconsistent with such a belief. You will say, "How? Is not the doctrine of final perseverance taught in the Articles?" Undoubtedly it is. But it is a flat contradiction to what is taught in the catechism. In the catechism, and in parts of the liturgy, we are distinctly taught that children are born-again and made members of Christ in baptism.

Now, to be regenerated, or born-again, is surely the beginning of a good and divine work in the soul. And then, according to this text, and according to the doctrine of final perseverance, such a divine work being begun, will most certainly be performed until the day of Christ. Now, no one will be so foolhardy as to assert that the good work which, according to the Prayer-Book, is begun in an infant at its so-called "baptism," is beyond all question perfected in the day of Christ. For, alas! we see these regenerated

people drunk, lying, swearing. We have them in prison, convicted of all kinds of crimes. We have even known them to be hanged. If I were an evangelical clergyman, and believed in the doctrine of final perseverance, I must at once renounce a church which teaches a lie so intolerable as that, that there is a work of grace begun on an unconscious infant in every case when water is sprinkled from priestly hands. No such work is begun, and consequently no such work is carried on.

The whole business of infant baptism, as practiced in the Anglican Episcopal church, is a perversion of Scripture, an insult to God, a mockery of the truth, and a deceiving of the souls of men. Let all who love the Lord, and hate evil, come out of this more and more apostatizing church, lest they be partakers of the plague which will come upon her in the day of her visitation.

II. Secondly, WE SHALL SHOW FURTHER GROUND FOR OUR BELIEF IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

Our first ground shall be *the express teaching of Holy Scripture*. But my dear friends, to quote all the Scriptural passages which teach that the saints shall hold on their way, would be to quote a large proportion of the Bible, for, to my mind, Scripture is saturated through and through with this truth. And I have often said that if any man could convince me that Scripture did not teach the perseverance of believers, I would at once reject Scripture altogether as teaching nothing at all, as being an incomprehensible book of which a plain man could make neither heads nor tails, for this seems to be of all doctrines the one that lies most evidently upon the surface.

Take the ninth verse of the seventeenth chapter of the book of Job, and hear the testimony of the Patriarch, “The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.” Not, “the righteous shall be saved, let him do what he will”—that we never believed, and never shall—but “the righteous shall hold on his way”—his way of holiness, his way of devotion, his way of faith—he shall hold to that, and he shall make a growth meanwhile, for he that has clean hands shall add “strength to strength,” as the Hebrew has it, or, as we put it, “shall be stronger and stronger.”

In the one hundred and twenty-fifth Psalm, read the first and second verses, “They that trust in the LORD,” that is the special description of a believer, “shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about His people from henceforth even forever.” Here are two specimen ears pulled out of those rich sheaves which are to be found in the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, how peremptory are the words of Christ in the tenth of John, twenty-eighth verse, “I give unto them eternal life”—not life temporal which may die, “and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

The apostle tells us, eleventh Romans, twenty-ninth verse, that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” That is, whatever gifts the Lord gives, He never changes his mind of having given them so as to take them back again. And whatever calling He makes of any man, He never retracts it, but he stands to it still. There is no playing fast and loose in divine mercy. His gifts and calling are without repentance.

Following that terrible passage in the sixth of Hebrews, which has raised so many questions, you find the apostle, who seems at first sight to have taught that believers might turn away, you find him in the ninth and tenth verses disclaiming any such idea. “Beloved,” says he, “we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

The apostle Peter, who is in no way given to administer too much comfort to the saints, but deals very sternly with hypocrisy, has put it very strongly in the first chapter of his first epistle, at the fifth verse, where he says of all the elect according to the foreknowledge of God, they are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Brethren, the fifty-fourth of Isaiah, which I read in your hearing this morning, with many more to the same effect, are scarcely to be understood if it is true that God's children may be cast away, and that God may forsake those whom He did foreknow. Yonder Bible seems to be disemboweled and stripped of its life, if the unchanging love of God is denied. The Word of God is laid on the threshing floor, and the chaff alone is gathered, and the wheat is cast away, if you take out of it its constant and incessant teaching that the "path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day."

But further, in addition to the express testimonies of Scripture, we have to support this doctrine *all the attributes of God*, for if those who have believed in Christ are not saved, then surely all the attributes of God are in peril. If He begins, and does not finish His work, all the parts of His character are dishonored. Where is His wisdom? Why did He begin that which He did not intend to finish? Where is His power?

Will not evil spirits always say, "that He *could not* do what He did not do"? Will it not be a standing jeer throughout the halls of hell that God began the work, and then stayed from it? Will they not say that the obstinacy of man's sin was greater than the grace of God, that the adamant of the human heart was too hard for God to dissolve? Would there not be a slur at once cast upon the omnipotence of divine grace?

And what shall we say of the immutability of God, if He casts away those whom He loves—how shall we think that He does not change? How will the human heart ever be able to look upon Him as immutable if after loving, He hates? And my brethren, where will be the faithfulness of God to the promises which He has made over and over again, and signed and sealed with oaths by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to lie? Where will be His grace if he casts away those that trust in Him, if after having tantalized us with sips of love He shall not bring us to drink from the fountainhead?

It is all in vain for us henceforth to trust if His promise can be forgotten and His mind can be turned. Henceforth we need not talk of Ebenezers in the past as though they comforted us for the future, if the Lord does cast away His children, for the past is no guarantee whatever as to what He may do in days to come. But the veracity of God to His promise, the faithfulness of God to His purpose, the immutability of God in His character, and the love of God in His essence—all these go to prove that He cannot and will not leave the soul that He has looked upon in mercy until the great work is done.

Further, how can it be that the righteous should, after all, fall from grace and perish, if you recollect *the doctrine of the atonement*? The doctrine of atonement, as we hold it, and believe it to be in Scripture, is this—that Jesus Christ rendered to divine justice a satisfaction for the sins of His people—that He was punished in their room, place, and stead. Now if He were so, and I do not believe any other atonements worth the turning of a finger, if He was really our satisfactory vicarious sacrifice, then how could the child of God be cast into hell? Why should he be cast there? His sins were laid on Christ—what is to condemn him? Christ has been condemned in his stead.

In the name of everlasting justice, which must stand, though heaven and earth should rock and reel, how can a man for whom Christ shed His blood be held as guilty before God, when Christ took his guilt, and was punished in his stead? He who believes must surely be ultimately brought to glory—the atonement requires it, and since he cannot come to glory without persevering in holiness, he must so persevere, or else the atonement is a thing that has no efficacy and force.

The doctrine of *justification*, in the next place, proves this. Every man that believes in Jesus is justified from all things, from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. The apostle Paul regards a man who is justified as being completely set free from the possibility of accusation. Have you not the rolling thunder of the apostle's holy boasting still in your ears, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" If nothing can be laid to their charge, if there be no accuser, who is he that condemns? If God considers believers just and righteous through the righteousness of His dear Son, if they put on His wondrous mantle, the fair white linen of a Savior's righteousness, where is there room

for anything to be brought against them by which they can be condemned? And if not accused, nor condemned, they must hold on their way, and be saved.

Further still, my brethren, *the intercession of Christ in heaven* is a guarantee for the salvation of all who trust Him. Remember Peter's case—"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." And the prayer of Christ preserved Peter, and made him weep bitterly after he had fallen into sin. The like prayer of our ever-watchful Shepherd is put up for all His chosen. Day and night he pleads, wearing the breastplate as our Great High Priest before the throne, and if He pleads for His people, how shall they perish unless indeed His intercession has lost its authority?

Moreover, do you not remember that every believer is said to be "*one with Christ*"? "For you are members of his body," says the apostle, "of his flesh, and of his bones." And is your imagination so depraved that you can picture Christ, the Head, united to a body in which the members frequently decay—hand, and foot, and eye, perhaps rotting off so as to need fresh members to be created in their stead? The metaphor is too atrocious for me to venture to enlarge upon it. "Because I live you shall live also," is the immortality that covers every member of the body of Christ. No fear that the righteous should turn back to sin, and give themselves up to their old corruptions, for the holiness that is in Christ by the vital energy of the Holy Spirit penetrates the entire system of the spiritual body, and the least member is preserved by the life of Christ.

Once more, *the inner life of the Christian* is a guarantee that he shall not go back into sin. Take such passages as these, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever" (1Pe 1:23). Now, if this seed be incorruptible, and abides forever, how say some among you that the righteous become corrupt, and fall from grace? Hear the Master, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." How say you, then, that this water which Jesus gives dries up, and ceases to flow?

Hear Him yet again, "As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eats me, even he shall live by me...He that eats of this bread shall live forever" (Joh 6:57-58). The life which Jesus implants in the heart of His people is allied to His own life, "For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "When he who is your life shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory."

The Holy Ghost dwells in us. "Know you not that your bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost?" O beloved, God Himself shall as soon die as the Christian, since the life of God is but eternal, and that is the life which Christ has given to us. "I give unto my sheep *eternal* life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

I leave the doctrine with your understandings, the Word of God being in your hands, and may the Spirit of God put it beyond a doubt in your souls that it is even so. Remember, it is not the doctrine that every man that believes in Christ shall be saved, let him do as he wishes, but it is this doctrine—that each man believing in Jesus shall receive the spirit of holiness, and shall be led on in the way of holiness from strength to strength until he comes unto the perfection which God will work in us at the coming of His own dear Son.

III. Lastly, we have to DRAW CERTAIN USEFUL INFERENCES from this doctrine.

One of the first is this—there is much in this truth *by way of comfort* to a child of God who today walks in darkness, and sees no light. You know that sometime ago the Lord revealed Himself to you. You remember times when the promises were peculiarly sweet, when the person of Christ was revealed to your spiritual vision in all its glory. Then, beloved, if some temporary depression of spirit should just now overwhelm you, if some heavy personal trial should pass over you, hear the words, "I am the Lord, I change not." Believe that if He hides His face, He still loves you. Do not judge Him by outward providences—judge Him by the teaching of His Word. Do as the bargemen on the canals do when they push backwards to drive their boat forwards. Take comfort from the past—snatch firebrands of comfort from the altars of yesterday to enkindle the sacrifices of today.

*“Determined to save, He watched o’er your path,
When Satan’s blind slave, you sported with death.
And can He have taught you to trust in His name,
And thus far have brought you, to put you to shame?”*

This doctrine should suggest to every Christian *the need of constant diligence*, that he may persevere to the end. “What?” says one, “Is that an inference from the doctrine? I should have thought the very reverse, for if the believer is to hold on his way, what need of diligence?” I reply that the misunderstanding lies with the objector. If the man is to be kept in holiness till life’s end, surely there is need that he should be kept in holiness, and the doctrine that he shall be so kept is one of his best means of producing the desired result.

If any of you should be well-assured that in a certain line of business you would make a vast sum of money, would that confidence lead you to refuse that business? Would it lead you to lie in bed all day, or to desert your post altogether? No, the assurance that you would be diligent and would prosper would make you diligent. I will borrow a metaphor from the revelries of the season, such as Paul borrowed from the games of Greece—if any rider at the races should be confident that he was destined to win, would that make him slacken speed? Napoleon believed himself to be the child of destiny, did that freeze his energies? To show you that the certainty of a thing does not hinder a man from striving after it, but rather quickens him, I will give you an anecdote of myself.

It happened to me when I was but a child of some ten years of age, or less. Mr. Richard Knill, of happy and glorious memory—an earnest worker for Christ, felt moved, I know not why, to take me on his knee at my grandfather’s house, and to utter words like these, which were treasured up by the family and by myself especially—“This child,” said he, “will preach the Gospel, and he will preach it to the largest congregations of our times.”

I believed his prophecy, and my standing here today is partly occasioned by such belief. It did not hinder me in my diligence in seeking to educate myself because I believed I was destined to preach the Gospel to large congregations—not at all—the prophecy helped forward its own fulfillment. I prayed and sought and strove, always having this Star of Bethlehem before me, that the day should come when I should preach the Gospel.

Even so, the belief that we shall one day be perfect never hinders any true believer from diligence, but is the highest possible incentive to make a man struggle with the corruptions of the flesh, and seek to persevere according to God’s promise. “Well, but” says one, “if God guarantees final perseverance to a man, why needs he pray for it?” Sir, how dare he pray for it if God had not guaranteed it? I dare not pray for what is not promised, but as soon as ever it is promised, I pray for it. And when I see it in God’s Word, I labor for it.

“Say what you will,” says one, “you are inconsistent.” Ah, well, my dear friend, we are bound to explain as best we can, but we are not bound to give understanding to those who have none. It is hard trying to make things appear aright to eyes that squint. It will sometimes happen that people cannot see truths which they do not particularly want to see. But the practical is the main thing, and I hope it shall be ours by practical argument to prove that while those who think that they can fall from grace run awful risks, and do fall, those who know they cannot, if they have truly believed, yet seek to walk with all carefulness and circumspection.

I would seek to live as if my salvation depended on myself, and then go back to my Lord, knowing that it does not depend on me in any sense at all. We would live as the opposite doctrine is *supposed* to make men live, which is exactly as the Calvinistic doctrine actually does make men live—namely, with earnestness of purpose, and with gracious gratitude to God, which is, after all, the mightiest influence—gratitude to God for having secured our salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Another matter drawn from the text is this—let us *learn from the text how to persevere*. Brethren, you will observe that the apostle’s reason for believing that the Philippians would persevere was not because they were such good and earnest people, but because God had begun the work. So our ground for holding on must be our resting in God. There is a dear brother sitting here this morning, a member of this church, who was once a member of another denomination of Christians. One night when he was quite young, and lately

converted, he knelt down to pray, and he felt himself cold and dead, and did not pray many minutes, but went to bed.

No sooner had he laid down, than a horror of darkness came over him, and he said to himself, "I have fallen from grace." Dear good soul as he was and is, he rose from his bed, began to pray, but got no better, and at five o'clock in the morning, away he went to his class leader. He began knocking at the door, and shouting to awaken him. "What do you want?" said the class leader, as he opened the window. The reply was, "Oh, I have fallen from grace." "Well," said the class leader, "if you have fallen from grace, go home and trust in the Lord." "And" said my friend, "I have done so ever since."

Yes, and if he had known the great truth before, he would not have been taken up with such nonsense as that of having fallen from grace. "Fallen from grace! Then go and simply trust in the Lord." Ay, and this is what we must all do, fallen or not. We must not trust within, but always rely on that dear Christ who died on the cross.

"Lord, if I am not a saint, and I often fear I have nothing to do with saintship, yet, Lord, I am a sinner, and You have died to save sinners, and I will cling to that. O precious blood, if I never did experience Your cleansing power, if up till now I have been in the gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity, yet there stands the grand old Gospel of the cross, 'He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.' Lord, I believe today if I never did before. Help Thou my unbelief." This is the true theory of perseverance—it is to persevere in being nothing, and letting Christ be everything. It is to persevere in resting wholly and simply in the power of the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

Lastly, *this doctrine has a voice to the unconverted*. I know it had to me. If anything in this world first led me to desire to be a Christian, it was the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. I had seen companions of my boyhood, somewhat more advanced than myself, who were held up to me as patterns of all that was excellent. I had seen them apprenticed in large towns, or launching out in business for themselves, and soon their moral excellences was swept away. Instead of being patterns, they came to be persons against whom the young were warned for their supremacy in vice.

This thought occurred to me—"That may also be my character in years to come. Is there any way by which a holy character can be ensured for the future? Is there any way by which a young man by taking heed may be kept from uncleanness and iniquity?" And I found that if I put my trust in Christ, I had the promise that I should hold on my way, and grow stronger and stronger. And though I feared I might never be a true believer, and so get the promise fulfilled to myself, for I was so unworthy, yet the music of it always charmed me. "Oh, if I could but come to Christ and hide myself like a dove in His wounds, then I should be safe. If I could but have Him to wash me from my past sins, then His Spirit would keep me from future sin, and I should be preserved to the end."

Does not this attract you? Oh, I hope there may be some who will be allured by such a salvation as this. We preach no rickety Gospel which will not bear your weight. It is no chariot whose axles will snap, or whose wheels will be taken off. This is no foundation of sand that may sink in the day of the flood. Here is the everlasting God pledging Himself by covenant and oath and He will write His law in your heart, that you shall not depart from Him. He will keep you, that you shall not wander into sin, and if for a while you stray, He will restore you again to the paths of righteousness.

O young men and maidens, turn in hither! Cast in your lot with Christ and His people. Trust Him, trust Him, trust Him, and then shall this precious truth be yours, and the experience of it be illustrated in your life—

*"My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase.
Impressed on His heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given.
More happy, but not more secure,
Are the glorified spirits in heaven."*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 54.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.